Scorching weather signals crisis point

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Body

Taking to Twitter midday Tuesday, the U.K.'s national weather service didn't need any scorching phrases to define the heat wave wreaking havoc on a nation more familiar with soggy summer picnics.

A simple graphic flashing 40 degrees Celsius did the job, plainly acknowledging the highest recorded temperature at London Heathrow. Ever.

Melting tarmac. Closed airports. Reduced transit services. Residents of the village of Wennington, just east of London, fleeing because their homes were on fire. "This is like the apocalypse," said one, a scene already familiar this summer in, oh, France and Portugal and Spain and Italy and Croatia and Greece, and now green, temperate England.

The rational mind will conclude that these are the effects of climate change. Climate change deniers will need to face facts like this one: the fire-ravaged destruction of 70,000 hectares in Spain is almost double the average of the last decade. "I would like to share the evidence and it is that climate change kills," said Spain's prime minister on Monday, meaning killing people, and killing ecosystems, and killing biodiversity.

The evidence has been there for long enough. It's the action on the evidence that's wanting.

Coincidentally, the current pattern of catastrophic weather in Europe, cataclysmic droughts in Africa, and an out-of-control fire again near Lytton, B.C. - this is just a short list - coincided with the 13th Petersberg Climate Dialogue, held this year in Berlin. The international gathering is designed as a precursor to the next COP meeting, COP27, scheduled for November. That sentence alone triggers a profound sense of weariness: of promises not kept, of goals not reached, of targets being reset and set again. Of Greta Thunberg's lacerating criticism that such gatherings are a bunch of blah, blah, blah.

Little wonder United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres offered grim opening remarks to the Petersberg dialogue. "Half of humanity is in the danger zone from floods, droughts, extreme storms and wildfires," he said, pleading for global co-operation and an end to empty promises.

Here's one: The $100-billion (U.S.)-a-year pledge that was to be mobilized to help developing countries achieve meaningful mitigation against climate change. That annual goal, set in 2009, was supposed to be met in 2020.

Enough with the lip service, Guterres said. "Give clarity through deadlines and time lines and get concrete on its delivery." A finance delivery plan, led jointly by Canada and Germany and released last October, forecast a delivery goal "as soon as possible and through 2025." Yet the "plan" cites insufficient data, challenges in providing for

ward-looking financial information and acknowledges that further work is needed.

What about the target to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius? That was on life support at the time of the last COP meeting, Guterres said. "Since then, its pulse has weakened further."

If decisive action is not taken, then what? Having run through a long list of climate action shortcomings, Guterres reached this conclusion: "We have a choice. Collective action or collective suicide."

Do we? (Have a choice, that is.) In a moment when West Virginia senator Joe Manchin - a Democrat - backs out of previous commitments to support climate spending? On Wednesday, U.S. President Joe Biden will address the climate crisis and federal measures to address it, as fires blaze in Texas and Alaska and Washington and Arizona and California and Idaho.

Undeniably, the world is at a crisis point, made more complicated by the war in Ukraine. Perhaps this will finally put the world's collective feet to the fire, as it were. Failing that ... well, a sadly poetic line from the European Commission's Frans Timmermans seems appropriate here. "We are almost reaching a situation where Mother Earth is going to shed humanity as an old skin, rid itself of all of us."

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